

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 13, 2016

Agenda Item: Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem Grizzly Bear Hunting Regulation Structure

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 Min

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Background: As part of the Yellowstone grizzly bear delisting process the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service is requiring Wyoming, Idaho and Montana to outline the structure and framework of any future grizzly bear hunting seasons. Montana FWP's draft season structure is based on mortality limits for the Demographic Monitoring Area (DMA) in the recovery plan and proposed delisting rule, which includes all types of mortality such as road kills and management removals. Mortality limits depend on the size of the bear population. If all types of mortality during a calendar year in the DMA are below the limits, then hunting could be allowed the following year. The number and sex of bears that could be taken by each state would be mutually agreed on by the states, but the total could not exceed the mortality limit for the DMA. We anticipate Montana's allocation of hunting season mortality, if any, will be a small number, less than 10 in most years and zero in some.

Montana's proposed grizzly bear season structure and framework is conservative and designed to minimize take of female bears. The important elements are:

- The season is very conservative. Mortality limits are based on the Chao2 estimate for the DMA, but it underestimates bears by ~40% (Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team) and there are many bears inside the DPS boundary but outside the DMA. Also, bears taken outside the DMA, even though not counted against the DMA mortality limits, will still be counted against Montana's harvest quota.
- Seven Grizzly Bear Management Units to distribute harvest and avoid multiple harvests in one unit. Each unit will have its own harvest quota that will close the unit if reached.
- To protect females and young of all ages no harvest of any bear that is with another bear or bears.
- Season dates designed to protect females. Females, especially those with young, emerge from dens later in the spring and go in earlier in the fall than do males. Proposed dates are early spring (Mar 15 – Apr 20) and late fall (Nov 10 – Dec 15). It is illegal to take a bear that is in its den.
- Limited quota of licenses by drawing equal to Montana's harvest allocation.
- Mandatory hunt orientation course for license holders.
- Seven-year wait for hunters who draw a license.
- Twelve-hour reporting period for harvests and mandatory check within two days.
- Season will close within 24 hours of reaching either the female quota or the male quota.

Public Involvement Process & Results: Public comment ended June 18 with over 340 comments received. Comments included general concerns or advocacy for hunting and delisting as well as specific requested changes to the proposal. Comments were summarized on two pages that follow this cover sheet in the commission packet and all comments were forwarded to the Commission.

Alternatives and Analysis: The mortality limits established for the DMA are the result of many years of intense research. The proposed hunting season framework was assembled by FWP staff closely involved with grizzly bears in the DMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the Commission adopt the proposed grizzly bear hunting regulation structure.

Proposed Motion: I propose that the Fish and Wildlife Commission adopt the proposed grizzly bear hunting regulation structure as presented by FWP.